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The Last Chronicle of Barset

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

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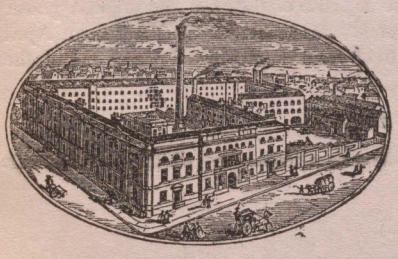

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"YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT STARTING IS, MY DEAR."

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE TRAGEDY IN HOOK COURT.

CONWAY DALRYMPLE had hurried out of the room in Mrs. Broughton's house in which he had been painting Jael and Sisera, thinking that it would be better to meet an angry and perhaps tipsy husband on the stairs, than it would be either to wait for him till he should make his way into his wife's room, or to hide away from him with the view of escaping altogether from so disagreeable an encounter. He had no fear of the man. He did not think that there would be any violence,—nor, as regarded himself, did he much care if there was to be violence. But he felt that he was bound, as far as it might be possible, to screen the poor woman from the ill effects of her husband's temper and condition. He was, therefore, prepared to stop Broughton on the stairs, and to use some force in arresting him on his way, should he find the man to be really intoxicated. But he had not descended above a stair or two before he was aware that the man below him, whose step had been heard in the hall, was not intoxicated, and that he was not Dobbs Broughton. It was Mr. Musselboro.

"It is you, is it?" said Conway. "I thought it was Broughton." Then he looked into the man's face and saw that he was ashy pale. All that appearance of low-bred jauntiness which used to belong to him seemed to have been washed out of him. His hair had forgotten to curl, his gloves had been thrown aside, and even his trinkets were out of sight. "What has happened?" said Conway. "What is the matter?

Something is wrong." Then it occurred to him that Musselboro had been sent to the house to tell the wife of the husband's ruin.

"The servant told me that I should find you upstairs," said Musselboro.

"Yes; I have been painting here. For some time past I have been doing a picture of Miss Van Siever. Mrs. Van Siever has been here to-day." Conway thought that this information would produce some strong effect on Clara's proposed husband; but he did not seem to regard the matter of the picture nor the mention of Miss Van Siever's name.

"She knows nothing of it?" said he. "She doesn't know yet?"

"Know what?" asked Conway. "She knows that her husband has lost money."

"Dobbs has—destroyed himself."

"What!"

"Blew his brains out this morning just inside the entrance at Hook Court. The horror of drink was on him, and he stood just in the pathway and shot himself. Bangles was standing at the top of their vaults and saw him do it. I don't think Bangles will ever be a man again. O Lord! I shall never get over it myself. The body was there when I went in." Then Musselboro sank back against the wall of the staircase, and stared at Dalrymple as though he still saw before him the terrible sight of which he had just spoken.

Dalrymple seated himself on the stairs and strove to bring his mind to bear on the tale which he had just heard. What was he to do, and how was that poor woman upstairs to be informed? "You came here intending to tell her," he said, in a whisper. He feared every moment that Mrs. Broughton would appear on the stairs, and learn from a word or two what had happened without any hint to prepare her for the catastrophe.

"I thought you would be here. I knew you were doing the picture. He knew it. He'd had a letter to say so,—one of those anonymous ones."

"But that didn't influence him?"

"I don't think it was that," said Musselboro. "He meant to have had it out with her; but it wasn't that as brought this about. Perhaps you didn't know that he was clean ruined?"

"She had told me."

"Then she knew it?"

"Oh, yes; she knew that. Mrs. Van Siever had told her. Poor creature! How are we to break this to her?"

"You and she are very thick," said Musselboro. "I suppose you'll do it best." By this time they were in the drawing-room, and the door was closed. Dalrymple had put his hand on the other man's arm, and had led him downstairs, out of reach of hearing from the room above. "You'll tell her,—won't you?" said Musselboro. Then Dalrymple tried to think what loving female friend there was who could break the news to the unfortunate woman. He knew of the Van Sievers, and he knew of the Demolines, and he almost knew that there was no other woman within reach whom he was entitled to regard as closely connected with Mrs. Broughton. He was well aware that the anonymous letter of which Musselboro had just spoken had come from Miss Demolines, and he could not go there for sympathy and assistance. Nor could he apply to Mrs. Van Siever after what had passed this morning. To Clara Van Siever he would have applied, but that it was impossible he should reach Clara except through her mother. "I suppose I had better go to her," he said, after a while. And then he went, leaving Musselboro in the drawing-room. "I'm so bad with it," said Musselboro, "that I really don't know how I shall ever go up that court again."

Conway Dalrymple made his way up the stairs with very slow steps, and as he did so he could not but think seriously of the nature of his friendship with this woman, and could not but condemn himself heartily for the folly and iniquity of his own conduct. Scores of times he had professed his love to her with half-expressed words, intended to mean nothing, as he said to himself when he tried to excuse himself, but enough to turn her head, even if they did not reach her heart. Now, this woman was a widow, and it came to be his duty to tell her that she was so. What if she should claim from him now the love which he had so often proffered to her! It was not that he feared that she would claim anything from him at this moment,—neither now, nor to-morrow, nor the next day,—but the agony of the present meeting would produce others in which there would be some tenderness mixed with the agony; and so from one meeting to another the thing would progress. Dalrymple knew well enough how such things might progress. But in this danger before him, it was not of himself that he was thinking, but of her. How could he assist her at such a time without doing her more injury than benefit? And, if he did not assist her, who would do so? He knew her to be heartless; but even heartless people have hearts which can be touched and almost broken by certain sorrows. Her heart would not be broken by her husband's death, but it would become very sore if she were utterly neglected.

He was now at the door, with his hand on the lock, and was wondering why she should remain so long within without making herself heard. Then he opened it, and found her seated in a lounging-chair, with her back to the door, and he could see that she had a volume of a novel in her hand. He understood it all. She was pretending to be indifferent to her husband's return. He walked up to her, thinking that she would recognize his step; but she made no sign of turning towards him. He saw the motion of her hair over the back of the chair as she affected to make herself luxuriously comfortable. She was striving to let her husband see that she cared nothing for him, or for his condition, or for his jealousy, if he were jealous,—or even for his ruin. "Mrs. Broughton," he said, when he was close to her. Then she jumped up quickly, and turned round, facing him. "Where is Dobbs?" she said. "Where is Broughton?"

"He is not here?"

"He is in the house, for I heard him. Why have you come back?"

Dalrymple's eye fell on the tattered canvas, and he thought of the doings of the past month. He thought of the picture of three Graces, which was hanging in the room below, and he thoroughly wished that he had never been introduced to the Broughton establishment. How was he to get through his present difficulty? "No," said he, "Broughton did not come. It was Mr. Musselboro whose steps you heard below."

"What is he here for? What is he doing here? Where is Dobbs? Conway, there is something the matter. He has gone off!"

"Yes;—he has gone off."

"The coward!"

"No; he was not a coward;—not in that way."

The use of the past tense, unintentional as it had been, told the story to the woman at once. "He is dead," she said. Then he took both her hands in his and looked into her face without speaking a word. And she gazed at him with fixed eyes, and rigid mouth, while the quick coming breath just moved the curl of her nostrils. It occurred to him at the moment that he had never before seen her so wholly unaffected, and had never before observed that she was so totally deficient in all the elements of real beauty. She was the first to speak again. "Conway," she said, "tell it me all. Why do you not speak to me?"

"There is nothing further to tell," said he.

Then she dropped his hands and walked away from him to the

window,—and stood there looking out upon the stuccoed turret of a huge house that stood opposite. As she did so she was employing herself in counting the windows. Her mind was paralysed by the blow, and she knew not how to make any exertion with it for any purpose. Everything was changed with her,—and was changed in such a way that she could make no guess as to her future mode of life. She was suddenly a widow, a pauper, and utterly desolate,—while the only person in the whole world that she really liked was standing close to her. But in the midst of it all she counted the windows of the house opposite. Had it been possible for her she would have put her mind altogether to sleep.

He let her stand for a few minutes and then joined her at the window. "My friend," he said, "what shall I do for you?"

"Do?" she said. "What do you mean by—doing?"

"Come and sit down and let me talk to you," he replied. Then he led her to the sofa, and as she seated herself I doubt whether she had not almost forgotten that her husband was dead.

"What a pity it was to cut it up," she said, pointing to the rags of Jael and Sisera.

"Never mind the picture now. Dreadful as it is, you must allow yourself to think of him for a few minutes."

"Think of what! O God! yes. Conway, you must tell me what to do. Was everything gone? It isn't about myself. I don't mind about myself. I wish it was me instead of him. I do. I do."

"No wishing is of any avail."

"But, Conway, how did it happen? Do you think it is true? That man would say anything to gain his object. Is he here now?"

"I believe he is here still."

"I won't see him. Remember that. Nothing on earth shall make me see him."

"It may be necessary, but I do not think it will be;—at any rate not yet."

"I will never see him. I believe that he has murdered my husband. I do. I feel sure of it. Now I think of it I am quite sure of it. And he will murder you too;—about that girl. He will. I tell you I know the man." Dalrymple simply shook his head, smiling sadly. "Very well! you will see. But, Conway, how do you know that it is true? Do you believe it yourself?"

"I do believe it."

"And how did it happen?"

"He could not bear the ruin that he had brought upon himself and you."

"Then;—then——" She went no further in her speech; but Dalrymple assented by a slight motion of his head, and she had been informed sufficiently that her husband had perished by his own hand. "What am I to do?" she said. "Oh, Conway;—you must tell me. Was there ever so miserable a woman! Was it——poison?"

He got up and walked quickly across the room and back again to the place where she was sitting. "Never mind about that now. You shall know all that in time. Do not ask any questions about that. If I were you I think I would go to bed. You will be better there than up, and this shock will make you sleep."

"No," she said. "I will not go to bed. How should I know that that man would not come to me and kill me? I believe he murdered Dobbs;—I do. You are not going to leave me, Conway?"

"I think I had better, for a while. There are things which should be done. Shall I send one of the women to you?"

"There is not one of them that cares for me in the least. Oh, Conway, do not go; not yet. I will not be left alone in the house with him. You will be very cruel if you go and leave me now,—when you have so often said that you,—that you,—that you were my friend." And now, at last, she began to weep.

"I think it will be best," he said, "that I should go to Mrs. Van Siever. If I can manage it I will get Clara to come to you."

"I do not want her," said Mrs. Broughton. "She is a heartless cold creature, and I do not want to have her near me. My poor husband was ruined among them;—yes, ruined among them. It has all been done that she may marry that horrid man and live here in this house. I have known ever so long that he has not been safe among them."

"You need fear nothing from Clara," said Dalrymple, with some touch of anger in his voice.

"Of course you will say so. I can understand that very well. And it is natural that you should wish to be with her. Pray go."

Then he sat beside her, and took her hand, and endeavoured to speak to her so seriously, that she herself might become serious, and if it might be possible, in some degree contemplative. He told her how necessary it was that she should have some woman near her in her trouble, and explained to her that as far as he knew her female friends, there would be no one who would be so considerate with her as Clara Van Siever. She at one time mentioned the name of Miss Demolines;

but Dalrymple altogether opposed the notion of sending for that lady, —expressing his opinion that the amiable Madalina had done all in her power to create quarrels both between Mrs. Broughton and her husband and between Dobbs Broughton and Mrs. Van Siever. And he spoke his opinion very fully about Miss Demolines. "And yet you liked her once," said Mrs. Broughton. "I never liked her," said Dalrymple with energy. "But all that matters nothing now. Of course you can send for her if you please; but I do not think her trustworthy, and I will not willingly come in contact with her." Then Mrs. Broughton gave him to understand that of course she must give way, but that in giving way she felt herself to be submitting to that ill-usage which is the ordinary lot of women, and to which she, among women, had been specially subjected. She did not exactly say as much, fearing that if she did he would leave her altogether; but that was the gist of her plaints and wails, and final acquiescence.

"And you are going?" she said, catching hold of his arm.

"I will employ myself altogether and only about your affairs, till I see you again."

"But I want you to stay."

"It would be madness. Look here;—lie down till Clara comes or till I return. Do not go beyond this room and your own. If she cannot come this evening I will return. Good-by now. I will see the servants as I go out, and tell them what ought to be told."

"Oh, Conway," she said, clutching hold of him again, "I know that you despise me."

"I do not despise you, and I will be as good a friend to you as I can. God bless you." Then he went, and as he descended the stairs he could not refrain from telling himself that he did in truth despise her.

His first object was to find Musselboro, and to dismiss that gentleman from the house. For though he himself did not attribute to Mrs. Van Siever's favourite any of those terrible crimes and potentialities for crime, with which Mrs. Dobbs Broughton had invested him, still he thought it reasonable that the poor woman upstairs should not be subjected to the necessity of either seeing him or hearing him. But Musselboro had gone, and Dalrymple could not learn from the head woman-servant whom he saw, whether before going he had told to any one in the house the tale of the catastrophe which had happened in the City. Servants are wonderful actors, looking often as though they knew nothing when they know everything,—as though they understood nothing, when they understand all. Dalrymple made known all that

was necessary, and the discreet upper servant listened to the tale with a proper amount of awe and horror and commiseration. "Shot hisself in the City;—laws! You'll excuse me, sir, but we all know'd as master was coming to no good." But she promised to do her best with her mistress,—and kept her promise. It is seldom that servants are not good in such straits as that.

From Mrs. Broughton's house Dalrymple went directly to Mrs. Van Siever's, and learned that Musselboro had been there about half an hour before, and had then gone off in a cab with Mrs. Van Siever. It was now nearly four o'clock in the afternoon, and no one in the house knew when Mrs. Van Siever would be back. Miss Van Siever was out, and had been out when Mr. Musselboro had called, but was expected in every minute. Conway therefore said that he would call again, and on returning found Clara alone. She had not then heard a word of the fate of Dobbs Broughton. Of course she would go at once to Mrs. Broughton, and if necessary stay with her during the night. She wrote a line at once to her mother, saying where she was, and went across to Mrs. Broughton leaning on Dalrymple's arm. "Be good to her," said Conway, as he left her at the door. "I will," said Clara. "I will be as kind as my nature will allow me." "And remember," said Conway, whispering into her ear as he pressed her hand at leaving her, "that you are all the world to me." It was perhaps not a proper time for an expression of love, but Clara Van Siever forgave the impropriety.

CHAPTER LXV.

MISS VAN SIEVER MAKES HER CHOICE.

Clara Van Siever did stay all that night with Mrs. Broughton. In the course of the evening she received a note from her mother, in which she was told to come home to breakfast. "You can go back to her afterwards," said Mrs. Van Siever; "and I will see her myself in the course of the day, if she will let me." The note was written on a scrap of paper, and had neither beginning nor end; but this was after the manner of Mrs. Van Siever, and Clara was not in the least hurt or surprised. "My mother will come to see you after breakfast," said Clara, as she was taking her leave.

"Oh, goodness! And what shall I say to her?"

"You will have to say very little. She will speak to you."

"I suppose everything belongs to her now," said Mrs. Broughton.

"I know nothing about that. I never do know anything of mamma's money matters."

"Of course she'll turn me out. I do not mind a bit about that,—only I hope she'll let me have some mourning." Then she made Clara promise that she would return as soon as possible, having in Clara's presence overcome all that feeling of dislike which she had expressed to Conway Dalrymple. Mrs. Broughton was generally affectionate to those who were near to her. Had Musselboro forced himself into her presence, she would have become quite confidential with him before he left her.

"Mr. Musselboro will be here directly," said Mrs. Van Siever, as she was starting for Mrs. Broughton's house. "You had better tell him to come to me there; or, stop,—perhaps you had better keep him here till I come back. Tell him to be sure and wait for me."

"Very well, mamma. I suppose he can wait below?"

"Why should he wait below?" said Mrs. Van Siever, very angrily. Clara had made the uncourteous proposition to her mother with the express intention of making it understood that she would have nothing to say to him. "He can come upstairs if he likes it," said Clara; "and I will go up to my room."

"If you fight shy of him, miss, you may remember this,—that you will fight shy of me at the same time."

"I am sorry for that, mamma, for I shall certainly fight shy of Mr. Musselboro."

"You can do as you please. I can't force you, and I shan't try. But I can make your life a burden to you,—and I will. What's the matter with the man that he isn't good enough for you? He's as good as any of your own people ever was. I hate your new-fangled airs,—with pictures painted on the sly, and all the rest of it. I hate such ways. See what they have brought that wretched man to, and the poor fool his wife. If you go and marry that painter, some of these days you'll be very much like what she is. Only I doubt whether he has got courage enough to blow his brains out." With these comfortable words, the old woman took herself off, leaving Clara to entertain her lover as best she might choose.

Mr. Musselboro was not long in coming, and, in accordance with Mrs. Van Siever's implied directions to her daughter, was shown up into the drawing-room. Clara gave him her mother's message in a very few words. "I was expressly told, sir, to ask you to stop, if it is not inconvenient, as she very much wants to see you." Mr. Musselboro declared that of course he would stop. He was only too happy to have

an opportunity of remaining in such delightful society. As Clara answered nothing to this, he went on to say that he hoped that the melancholy occasion of Mrs. Van Siever's visit to Mrs. Broughton might make a long absence necessary,—he did not, indeed, care how long it might be. He had recovered now from that paleness, and that want of gloves and jewellery which had befallen him on the previous day immediately after the sight he had seen in the City. Clara made no answer to the last speech, but, putting some things together in her work-basket, prepared to leave the room. "I hope you are not going to leave me?" he said, in a voice that was intended to convey much of love, and something of melancholy.

"I am so shocked by what has happened, Mr. Musselboro, that I am altogether unfit for conversation. I was with poor Mrs. Broughton last night, and I shall return to her when mamma comes home."

"It is sad, certainly; but what was there to be expected? If you'd only seen how he used to go on." To this Clara made no answer. "Don't go yet," said he; "there is something that I want to say to you. There is, indeed."

Clara Van Siever was a young woman whose presence of mind rarely deserted her. It occurred to her now that she must undergo on some occasion the nuisance of a direct offer from this man, and that she could have no better opportunity of answering him after her own fashion than the present. Her mother was absent, and the field was her own. And, moreover, it was a point in her favour that the tragedy which had so lately occurred, and to which she had just now alluded, would give her a fair excuse for additional severity. At such a moment no man could, she told herself, be justified in making an offer of his love, and therefore she might rebuke him with the less remorse. I wonder whether the last words which Conway Dalrymple had spoken to her stung her conscience as she thought of this! She had now reached the door, and was standing close to it. As Mr. Musselboro did not at once begin, she encouraged him. "If you have anything special to tell me, of course I will hear you," she said.

"Miss Clara," he began, rising from his chair, and coming into the middle of the room, "I think you know what my wishes are." Then he put his hand upon his heart. "And your respected mother is the same way of thinking. It's that that emboldens me to be so sudden. Not but what my heart has been yours and yours only all along, before the old lady so much as mentioned it." Clara would give him no assistance, not even the aid of a negative, but stood there quite passive, with her hand on the door. "Since I first had the pleasure of seeing

you I have always said to myself, 'Augustus Musselboro, that is the woman for you, if you can only win her.' But then there was so much against me,—wasn't there?" She would not even take advantage of this by assuring him that there certainly always had been much against him, but allowed him to go on till he should run out all the length of his tether. "I mean, of course, in the way of money," he continued. "I hadn't much that I could call my own when your respected mamma first allowed me to become acquainted with you. But it's different now; and I think I may say that I'm all right in that respect. Poor Broughton's going in this way will make it a deal smoother to me; and I may say that I and your mamma will be all in all to each other now about money." Then he stopped.

"I don't quite understand what you mean by all this," said Clara.

"I mean that there isn't a more devoted fellow in all London than what I am to you." Then he was about to go down on one knee, but it occurred to him that it would not be convenient to kneel to a lady who would stand quite close to the door. "One and one, if they're put together well, will often make more than two, and so they shall with us," said Musselboro, who began to feel that it might be expedient to throw a little spirit into his words.

"If you have done," said Clara, "you may as well hear me for a minute. And I hope you will have sense to understand that I really mean what I say."

"I hope you will remember what are your mamma's wishes."

"Mamma's wishes have no influence whatsoever with me in such matters as this. Mamma's arrangements with you are for her own convenience, and I am not a party to them. I do not know anything about mamma's money, and I do not want to know. But under no possible circumstances will I consent to become your wife. Nothing that mamma could say or do would induce me even to think of it. I hope you will be man enough to take this for an answer, and say nothing more about it."

"But, Miss Clara——"

"It's no good your Miss Claraing me, sir. What I have said you may be sure I mean. Good-morning, sir." Then she opened the door, and left him.

"By Jove, she is a Tartar," said Musselboro to himself, when he was alone. "They're both Tartars, but the younger is the worse." Then he began to speculate whether Fortune was not doing the best for him in so arranging that he might have the use of the Tartar-mother's

money without binding himself to endure for life the Tartar qualities of the daughter.

It had been understood that Clara was to wait at home till her mother should return before she again went across to Mrs. Broughton. At about eleven Mrs. Van Siever came in, and her daughter intercepted her at the dining-room door before she had made her way upstairs to Mr. Musselboro. "How is she, mamma?" said Clara with something of hypocrisy in her assumed interest for Mrs. Broughton.

"She is an idiot," said Mrs. Van Siever.

"She has had a terrible misfortune!"

"That is no reason why she should be an idiot; and she is heartless too. She never cared a bit for him;—not a bit."

"He was a man whom it was impossible to care for much. I will go to her now, mamma."

"Where is Musselboro?"

"He is upstairs."

"Well?"

"Mamma, that is quite out of the question. Quite. I would not marry him to save myself from starving."

"You do not know what starving is yet, my dear. Tell me the truth at once. Are you engaged to that painter?" Clara paused a moment before she answered, not hesitating as to the expediency of telling her mother any truth on the matter in question, but doubting what the truth might really be. Could she say that she was engaged to Mr. Dalrymple, or could she say that she was not? "If you tell me a lie, miss, I'll have you put out of the house."

"I certainly shall not tell you a lie. Mr. Dalrymple has asked me to be his wife, and I have made him no answer. If he asks me again I shall accept him."

"Then I order you not to leave this house," said Mrs. Van Siever.

"Surely I may go to Mrs. Broughton?"

"I order you not to leave this house," said Mrs. Van Siever again,—and thereupon she stalked out of the dining-room and went upstairs. Clara had been standing with her bonnet on, ready dressed to go out, and the mother made no attempt to send the daughter up to her room. That she did not expect to be obeyed in her order may be inferred from the first words which she spoke to Mr. Musselboro. "She has gone off to that man now. You are no good, Musselboro, at this kind of work."

"You see, Mrs. Van, he had the start of me so much. And then being at the West End, and all that, gives a man such a standing with a girl!"

"Bother!" said Mrs. Van Siever, as her quick ear caught the sound of the closing hall-door. Clara had stood a minute or two to consider, and then had resolved that she would disobey her mother. She tried to excuse her own conduct to her own satisfaction as she went. "There are some things," she said, "which even a daughter cannot hear from her mother. If she chooses to close the door against me, she must do so."

She found Mrs. Broughton still in bed, and could not but agree with her mother that the woman was both silly and heartless.

"Your mother says that everything must be sold up," said Mrs. Broughton.

"At any rate you would hardly choose to remain here," said Clara.

"But I hope she'll let me have my own things. A great many of them are altogether my own. I know there's a law that a woman may have her own things, even though her husband has,—done what poor Dobbs did. And I think she was hard upon me about the mourning. They never do mind giving credit for such things as that, and though there is a bill due to Mrs. Morell now, she has had a deal of Dobbs's money." Clara promised her that she should have mourning to her heart's content. "I will see to that myself," she said.

Presently there was a knock at the door, and the discreet head-servant beckoned Clara out of the room. "You are not going away," said Mrs. Broughton. Clara promised her that she would not go without coming back again. "He will be here soon, I suppose, and perhaps you had better see him; though, for the matter of that, perhaps you had better not, because he is so much cut up about poor Dobbs." The servant had come up to tell Clara that the "he" in question was at the present moment waiting for her below stairs.

The first words which passed between Dalrymple and Clara had reference to the widow. He told her what he had learned in the City,—that Broughton's property had never been great, and that his personal liabilities at the time of his death were supposed to be small. But he had fallen lately altogether into the hands of Musselboro, who, though penniless himself in the way of capital, was backed by the money of Mrs. Van Siever. There was no doubt that Broughton had destroyed himself in the manner told by Musselboro, but the opinion in the City was that he had done so rather through the effects of drink than because of his losses. As to the widow, Dalrymple thought that Mrs. Van Siever, or nominally, perhaps, Musselboro, might be induced to settle an annuity on her, if she would give up everything quietly.

"I doubt whether your mother is not responsible for everything Broughton owed when he died,—for everything, that is, in the way of business; and if so, Mrs. Broughton will certainly have a claim upon the estate." It occurred to Dalrymple once or twice that he was talking to Clara about Mrs. Van Siever as though he and Clara were more closely bound together than were Clara and her mother; but Clara seemed to take this in good part, and was as solicitous as was he himself in the matter of Mrs. Broughton's interest.

Then the discreet head-servant knocked and told them that Mrs. Broughton was very anxious to see Mr. Dalrymple, but that Miss Van Siever was on no account to go away. She was up, and in her dressing-gown, and had gone into the sitting-room. "I will come directly," said Dalrymple, and the discreet head-servant retired.

"Clara," said Conway, "I do not know when I may have another chance of asking for an answer to my question. You heard my question?"

"Yes, I heard it."

"And will you answer it?"

"If you wish it, I will."

"Of course I wish it. You understood what I said upon the doorstep yesterday"

"I don't think much of that; men say those things so often. What you said before was serious, I suppose?"

"Serious! Heavens! do you think that I am joking?"

"Mamma wants me to marry Mr. Musselboro."

"He is a vulgar brute. It would be impossible."

"It is impossible; but mamma is very obstinate. I have no fortune of my own,—not a shilling. She told me to-day that she would turn me into the street. She forbade me to come here, thinking I should meet you; but I came, because I had promised Mrs. Broughton. I am sure that she will never give me one shilling."

Dalrymple paused for a moment. It was certainly true that he had regarded Clara Van Siever as an heiress, and had at first been attracted to her because he thought it expedient to marry an heiress. But there had since come something beyond that, and there was perhaps less of regret than most men would have felt as he gave up his golden hopes. He took her into his arms and kissed her, and called her his own. "Now we understand each other," he said.

"If you wish it to be so."

"I do wish it."

"And I shall tell my mother to-day that I am engaged to you,—

unless she refuses to see me. Go to Mrs. Broughton now. I feel that we are almost cruel to be thinking of ourselves in this house at such a time." Upon this Dalrymple went, and Clara Van Siever was left to her reflections. She had never before had a lover. She had never had even a friend whom she loved and trusted. Her life had been passed at school till she was nearly twenty, and since then she had been vainly endeavouring to accommodate herself and her feelings to her mother. Now she was about to throw herself into the absolute power of a man who was nearly a stranger to her! But she did love him, as she had never loved any one else;—and then, on the other side, there was Mr. Musselboro!

Dalrymple was upstairs for an hour, and Clara did not see him again before he left the house. It was clear to her, from Mrs. Broughton's first words, that Conway had told her what had passed. "Of course I shall never see anything more of either of you now?" said Mrs. Broughton.

"I should say that probably you will see a great deal of us both."

"There are some people," said Mrs. Broughton, "who can do well for their friends, but can never do well for themselves. I am one of them. I saw at once how great a thing it would be for both of you to bring you two together,—especially for you, Clara; and therefore I did it. I may say that I never had it out of my mind for months past. Poor Dobbs misunderstood what I was doing. God knows how far that may have brought about what has happened."

"Oh, Mrs. Broughton!"

"Of course he could not be blind to one thing;—nor was I. I mention it now because it is right, but I shall never, never allude to it again. Of course he saw, and I saw, that Conway——was attached to me. Poor Conway meant no harm. I was aware of that. But there was the terrible fact. I knew at once that the only cure for him was a marriage with some girl that he could respect. Admiring you as I do, I immediately resolved on bringing you two together. My dear, I have been successful, and I heartily trust that you may be happier than Maria Broughton."

Miss Van Siever knew the woman, understood all the facts, and pitying the condition of the wretched creature, bore all this without a word of rebuke. She scorned to put out her strength against one who was in truth so weak.

CHAPTER LXVI.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE.

Things were very gloomy at the palace. It has been already said that for many days after Dr. Tempest's visit to Barchester the intercourse between the bishop and Mrs Proudie had not been of a pleasant nature. He had become so silent, so sullen, and so solitary in his ways, that even her courage had been almost cowed, and for a while she had condescended to use gentler measures, with the hope that she might thus bring her lord round to his usual state of active submission ; or perhaps, if we strive to do her full justice, we may say of her that her effort was made conscientiously, with the idea of inducing him to do his duty with proper activity. For she was a woman not without a conscience, and by no means indifferent to the real service which her husband, as bishop of the diocese, was bound to render to the affairs of the Church around her. Of her own struggles after personal dominion she was herself unconscious; and no doubt they gave her, when recognized and acknowledged by herself, many stabs to her inner self, of which no single being in the world knew anything. And now, as after a while she failed in producing any amelioration in the bishop's mood, her temper also gave way, and things were becoming very gloomy and very unpleasant.

The bishop and his wife were at present alone in the palace. Their married daughter and her husband had left them, and their unmarried daughter was also away. How far the bishop's mood may have produced this solitude in the vast house I will not say. Probably Mrs. Proudie's state of mind may have prevented her from having other guests in the place of those who were gone. She felt herself to be almost disgraced in the eyes of all those around her by her husband's long absence from the common rooms of the house and by his dogged silence at meals. It was better, she thought, that they two should be alone in the palace.

Her own efforts to bring him back to something like life, to some activity of mind if not of body, were made constantly ; and when she failed, as she did fail day after day, she would go slowly to her own room, and lock her door, and look back in her solitude at all the days of her life. She had agonies in these minutes of which no one near her

knew anything. She would seize with her arm the part of the bed near which she would stand, and hold by it, grasping it, as though she were afraid to fall; and then, when it was at the worst with her, she would go to her closet,—a closet that no eyes ever saw unlocked but her own, —and fill for herself and swallow some draught; and then she would sit down with the Bible before her, and read it sedulously. She spent hours every day with her Bible before her, repeating to herself whole chapters, which she almost knew by heart.

It cannot be said that she was a bad woman, though she had in her time done an indescribable amount of evil. She had endeavoured to do good, failing partly by ignorance and partly from the effects of an unbridled, ambitious temper. And now, even amidst her keenest sufferings, her ambition was by no means dead. She still longed to rule the diocese by means of her husband,—but was made to pause and hesitate by the unwonted mood that had fallen upon him. Before this, on more than one occasion, and on one very memorable occasion, he had endeavoured to combat her. He had fought with her, striving to put her down. He had failed, and given up the hope of any escape for himself in that direction. On those occasions her courage had never quailed for a moment. While he openly struggled to be master, she could openly struggle to be mistress,—and could enjoy the struggle. But nothing like this moodiness had ever come upon him before.

She had yielded to it for many days, striving to coax him by little softnesses of which she herself had been ashamed as she practised them. They had served her nothing, and at last she determined that something else must be done. If only for his sake, to keep some life in him, something else must be done. Were he to continue as he was now, he must give up his diocese, or, at any rate, declare himself too ill to keep the working of it in his own hands. How she hated Mr. Crawley for all the sorrow that he had brought upon her and her house!

And it was still the affair of Mr. Crawley which urged her on to further action. When the bishop received Mr. Crawley's letter he said nothing of it to her; but he handed it over to his chaplain. The chaplain, fearing to act upon it himself, handed it to Mr. Thumble, whom he knew to be one of the bishop's commission, and Mr. Thumble, equally fearing responsibility in the present state of affairs at the palace, found himself obliged to consult Mrs. Proudie. Mrs. Proudie had no doubt as to what should be done. The man had abdicated his living, and of course some provision must be made for the services. She would again make an attempt upon her husband, and therefore she went into his room holding Mr. Crawley's letter in her hand.

"My dear," she said, "here is Mr. Crawley's letter. I suppose you have read it?"

"Yes," said the bishop; "I have read it."

"And what will you do about it? Something must be done."

"I don't know," said he. He did not even look at her as he spoke. He had not turned his eyes upon her since she had entered the room.

"But, bishop, it is a letter that requires to be acted upon at once. We cannot doubt that the man is doing right at last. He is submitting himself where his submission is due; but his submission will be of no avail unless you take some action upon his letter. Do you not think that Mr. Thumble had better go over?"

"No, I don't. I think Mr. Thumble had better stay where he is," said the irritated bishop.

"What, then, would you wish to have done?"

"Never mind," said he.

"But, bishop, that is nonsense," said Mrs. Proudie, adding something of severity to the tone of her voice.

"No, it isn't nonsense," said he. Still he did not look at her, nor had he done so for a moment since she had entered the room. Mrs. Proudie could not bear this, and as her anger became strong within her breast, she told herself that she would be wrong to bear it. She had tried what gentleness would do, and she had failed. It was now imperatively necessary that she should resort to sterner measures. She must make him understand that he must give her authority to send Mr. Thumble to Hogglestock.

"Why do you not turn round and speak to me properly?" she said.

"I do not want to speak to you at all," the bishop answered.

This was very bad;—almost anything would be better than this. He was sitting now over the fire, with his elbows on his knees, and his face buried in his hands. She had gone round the room so as to face him, and was now standing almost over him, but still she could not see his countenance. "This will not do at all," she said. "My dear, do you know that you are forgetting yourself altogether?"

"I wish I could forget myself."

"That might be all very well if you were in a position in which you owed no service to any one; or, rather, it would not be well then, but the evil would not be so manifest. You cannot do your duty in the diocese if you continue to sit there doing nothing, with your head upon your hands. Why do you not rally, and get to your work like a man?"

"I wish you would go away and leave me," he said.

"No, bishop, I will not go away and leave you. You have brought yourself to such a condition that it is my duty as your wife to stay by you; and if you neglect your duty, I will not neglect mine."

"It was you that brought me to it."

"No, sir, that is not true. I did not bring you to it."

"It is the truth." And now he got up and looked at her. For a moment he stood upon his legs, and then again he sat down with his face turned towards her. "It is the truth. You have brought on me such disgrace that I cannot hold up my head. You have ruined me. I wish I were dead; and it is all through you that I am driven to wish it."

Of all that she had suffered in her life this was the worst. She clasped both her hands to her side as she listened to him, and for a minute or two she made no reply. When he ceased from speaking he again put his elbows on his knees and again buried his face in his hands. What had she better do, or how was it expedient that she should treat him? At this crisis the whole thing was so important to her that she would have postponed her own ambition and would have curbed her temper had she thought that by doing so she might in any degree have benefited him. But it seemed to her that she could not rouse him by conciliation. Neither could she leave him as he was. Something must be done. "Bishop," she said, "the words that you speak are sinful, very sinful."

"You have made them sinful," he replied.

"I will not hear that from you. I will not indeed. I have endeavoured to do my duty by you, and I do not deserve it. I am endeavouring to do my duty now, and you must know that it would ill become me to remain quiescent while you are in such a state. The world around you is observing you, and knows that you are not doing your work. All I want of you is that you should arouse yourself, and go to your work."

"I could do my work very well," he said, "if you were not here."

"I suppose, then, you wish that I were dead?" said Mrs. Proudie. To this he made no reply, nor did he stir himself. How could flesh and blood bear this,—female flesh and blood,—Mrs. Proudie's flesh and blood? Now, at last, her temper once more got the better of her judgment, probably much to her immediate satisfaction, and she spoke out. "I'll tell you what it is, my lord; if you are imbecile, I must be active. It is very sad that I should have to assume your authority——"

"I will not allow you to assume my authority."

"I must do so, or must else obtain a medical certificate as to your incapacity, and beg that some neighbouring bishop may administer the diocese. Things shall not go on as they are now. I, at any rate, will do my duty. I shall tell Mr. Thumble that he must go over to Hogglestock, and arrange for the duties of the parish."

"I desire that you will do no such thing," said the bishop, now again looking up at her.

"You may be sure that I shall," said Mrs. Proudie, and then she left the room.

He did not even yet suppose that she would go about this work at once. The condition of his mind was in truth bad, and was becoming worse, probably, from day to day; but still he did make his calculations about things, and now reflected that it would be sufficient if he spoke to his chaplain to-morrow about Mr. Crawley's letter. Since the terrible scene that Dr. Tempest had witnessed, he had never been able to make up his mind as to what great step he would take, but he had made up his mind that some great step was necessary. There were moments in which he thought that he would resign his bishopric. For such resignation, without acknowledged incompetence on the score of infirmity, the precedents were very few; but even if there were no precedents, it would be better to do that than to remain where he was. Of course there would be disgrace. But then it would be disgrace from which he could hide himself. Now there was equal disgrace; and he could not hide himself. And then such a measure as that would bring punishment where punishment was due. It would bring his wife to the ground, —her who had brought him to the ground. The suffering should not be all his own. When she found that her income, and her palace, and her position were all gone, then perhaps she might repent the evil that she had done him. Now, when he was left alone, his mind went back to this, and he did not think of taking immediate measures,—measures on that very day,—to prevent the action of Mr. Thumble.

But Mrs. Proudie did take immediate steps. Mr. Thumble was at this moment in the palace waiting for instructions. It was he who had brought Mr. Crawley's letter to Mrs. Proudie, and she now returned to him with that letter in her hand. The reader will know what was the result. Mr. Thumble was sent off to Hogglestock at once on the bishop's old cob, and,—as will be remembered,—fell into trouble on the road. Late in the afternoon he entered the palace yard, having led the cob by the bridle the whole way home from Hogglestock.

Some hour or two before Mr. Thumble's return Mrs. Proudie returned to her husband, thinking it better to let him know what she

had done. She resolved to be very firm with him, but at the same time she determined not to use harsh language if it could be avoided. "My dear," she said, "I have arranged with Mr. Thumble." She found him on this occasion sitting at his desk with papers before him, with a pen in his hand; and she could see at a glance that nothing had been written on the paper. What would she have thought had she known that when he placed the sheet before him he was proposing to consult the archbishop as to the propriety of his resignation! He had not, however, progressed so far as to write even the date of his letter.

"You have done what?" said he, throwing down the pen.

"I have arranged with Mr. Thumble as to going out to Hogglestock," said she firmly. "Indeed he has gone already." Then the bishop jumped up from his seat, and rang the bell with violence. "What are you going to do?" said Mrs. Proudie.

"I am going to depart from here," said he. "I will not stay here to be the mark of scorn for all men's fingers. I will resign the diocese."

"You cannot do that," said his wife.

"I can try, at any rate," said he. Then the servant entered. "John," said he, addressing the man, "let Mr. Thumble know the moment he returns to the palace that I wish to see him here. Perhaps he may not come to the palace. In that case let word be sent to his house."

Mrs. Proudie allowed the man to go before she addressed her husband again. "What do you mean to say to Mr. Thumble when you see him?"

"That is nothing to you."

She came up to him and put her hand upon his shoulder, and spoke to him very gently. "Tom," she said, "is that the way in which you speak to your wife?"

"Yes, it is. You have driven me to it. Why have you taken upon yourself to send that man to Hogglestock?"

"Because it was right to do so. I came to you for instructions, and you would give none."

"I should have given what instructions I pleased in proper time. Thumble shall not go to Hogglestock next Sunday."

"Who shall go, then?"

"Never mind. Nobody. It does not matter to you. If you will leave me now I shall be obliged to you. There will be an end of all this very soon,—very soon."

Mrs. Proudie after this stood for a while thinking what she would

say; but she left the room without uttering another word. As she looked at him a hundred different thoughts came into her mind. She had loved him dearly, and she loved him still; but she knew now,—at this moment felt absolutely sure,—that by him she was hated! In spite of all her roughness and temper, Mrs. Proudie was in this like other women,—that she would fain have been loved had it been possible. She had always meant to serve him. She was conscious of that; conscious also in a way that, although she had been industrious, although she had been faithful, although she was clever, yet she had failed. At the bottom of her heart she knew that she had been a bad wife. And yet she had meant to be a pattern wife! She had meant to be a good Christian; but she had so exercised her Christianity that not a soul in the world loved her, or would endure her presence if it could be avoided! She had sufficient insight to the minds and feelings of those around her to be aware of this. And now her husband had told her that her tyranny to him was so overbearing that he must throw up his great position, and retire to an obscurity that would be exceptionally disgraceful to them both, because he could no longer endure the public disgrace which her conduct brought upon him in his high place before the world! Her heart was too full for speech; and she left him, very quietly closing the door behind her.

She was preparing to go up to her chamber, with her hand on the banisters and with her foot on the stairs, when she saw the servant who had answered the bishop's bell. "John," she said, "when Mr. Thumble comes to the palace, let me see him before he goes to my lord."

"Yes, ma'am," said John, who well understood the nature of these quarrels between his master and his mistress. But the commands of the mistress were still paramount among the servants, and John proceeded on his mission with the view of accomplishing Mrs. Proudie's behests. Then Mrs. Proudie went upstairs to her chamber, and locked her door.

Mr. Thumble returned to Barchester that day, leading the broken-down cob; and a dreadful walk he had. He was not good at walking, and before he came near Barchester had come to entertain a violent hatred for the beast he was leading. The leading of a horse that is tired, or in pain, or lame, or even stiff in his limbs, is not pleasant work. The brute will not accommodate his paces to the man, and will contrive to make his head very heavy on the bridle. And he will not walk on the part of the road which the man intends for him, but will lean against the man, and will make himself altogether very disagree-

able. It may be understood, therefore, that Mr. Thumble was not in a good humour when he entered the palace yard. Nor was he altogether quiet in his mind as to the injury which he had done to the animal. "It was the brute's fault," said Mr. Thumble. "It comes generally of not knowing how to ride 'em," said the groom. For Mr. Thumble, though he often had a horse out of the episcopal stables, was not ready with his shillings to the man who waited upon him with the steed.

He had not, however, come to any satisfactory understanding respecting the broken knees when the footman from the palace told him he was wanted. It was in vain that Mr. Thumble pleaded that he was nearly dead with fatigue, that he had walked all the way from Hogglestock and must go home to change his clothes. John was peremptory with him, insisting that he must wait first upon Mrs. Proudie and then upon the bishop. Mr. Thumble might perhaps have turned a deaf ear to the latter command, but the former was one which he felt himself bound to obey. So he entered the palace, rather cross, very much soiled as to his outer man; and in this condition went up a certain small staircase which was familiar to him, to a small parlour which adjoined Mrs. Proudie's room, and there awaited the arrival of the lady. That he should be required to wait some quarter of an hour was not surprising to him; but when half an hour was gone, and he remembered himself of his own wife at home, and of the dinner which he had not yet eaten, he ventured to ring the bell. Mrs. Proudie's own maid, Mrs. Draper by name, came to him and said that she had knocked twice at Mrs. Proudie's door and would knock again. Two minutes after that she returned, running into the room with her arms extended, and exclaiming, "Oh, heavens, sir; mistress is dead!" Mr. Thumble, hardly knowing what he was about, followed the woman into the bedroom, and there he found himself standing awestruck before the corpse of her who had so lately been the presiding spirit of the palace.

The body was still resting on its legs, leaning against the end of the side of the bed, while one of the arms was close clasped round the bed-post. The mouth was rigidly close, but the eyes were open as though staring at him. Nevertheless there could be no doubt from the first glance that the woman was dead. He went up close to it, but did not dare to touch it. There was no one as yet there but he and Mrs. Draper;—no one else knew what had happened.

"It's her heart," said Mrs. Draper.

"Did she suffer from heart complaint?" he asked.

"We suspected it, sir, though nobody knew it. She was very shy of talking about herself."

"We must send for the doctor at once," said Mr. Thumble. "We had better touch nothing till he is here." Then they retreated and the door was locked.

In ten minutes everybody in the house knew it except the bishop; and in twenty minutes the nearest apothecary with his assistant were in the room, and the body had been properly laid upon the bed. Even then the husband had not been told,—did not know either his relief or his loss. It was now past seven, which was the usual hour for dinner at the palace, and it was probable that he would come out of his room among the servants, if he were not summoned. When it was proposed to Mr. Thumble that he should go in to him and tell him, he positively declined, saying that the sight which he had just seen and the exertions of the day together, had so unnerved him, that he had not physical strength for the task. The apothecary, who had been summoned in a hurry, had escaped, probably being equally unwilling to be the bearer of such a communication. The duty therefore fell to Mrs. Draper, and under the pressing instance of the other servants she descended to her master's room. Had it not been that the hour of dinner had come, so that the bishop could not have been left much longer to himself, the evil time would have been still postponed.

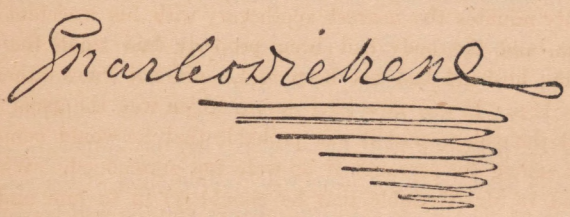
She went very slowly along the passage, and was just going to pause ere she reached the room, when the door was opened and the bishop stood close before her. It was easy to be seen that he was cross. His hands and face were unwashed and his face was haggard. In these days he would not even go through the ceremony of dressing himself before dinner. "Mrs. Draper," he said, "why don't they tell me that dinner is ready? Are they going to give me any dinner?" She stood a moment without answering him, while the tears streamed down her face. "What is the matter?" said he. "Has your mistress sent you here?"

"Oh, laws!" said Mrs. Draper,—and she put out her hands to support him if such support should be necessary.

"What is the matter?" he demanded angrily.

"Oh, my lord;—bear it like a Christian. Mistress isn't no more." He leaned back against the door-post, and she took hold of him by the arm. "It was the heart, my lord. Dr. Fillgrave hisself has not been yet; but that's what it was." The bishop did not say a word, but walked back to his chair before the fire.

THE



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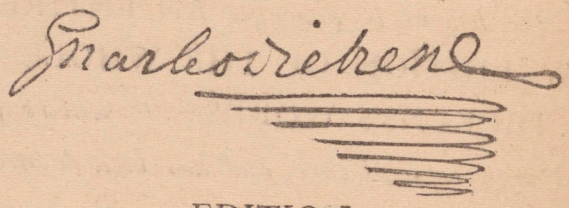

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[SEE SPECIMEN PAGE ON THE OTHER SIDE.

"A *glass* of water!" said the passionate Wardle. "Bring a bucket, and throw it all over her; it'll do her good, and she richly deserves it."

"Ugh, you brute!" ejaculated the kind-hearted landlady. "Poor dear." And with sundry ejaculations, of "Come now, there's a dear—drink a little of this—it'll do you good—don't give way so—there's a love," &c., &c., the landlady, assisted by a chamber-maid, proceeded to vinegar the forehead, beat the hands, titillate the nose, and unlace the stays of the spinster aunt, and to administer such other restoratives as are usually applied by compassionate females to ladies who are endeavouring to ferment themselves into hysterics.

"Coach is ready, sir," said Sam, appearing at the door.

"Come along," cried Wardle. "I'll carry her down stairs."

At this proposition, the hysterics came on with redoubled violence.

The landlady was about to enter a very violent protest against this proceeding, and had already given vent to an indignant inquiry whether Mr. Wardle considered himself a lord of the creation, when Mr. Jingle interposed—

"Boots," said he, "get me an officer."

"Stay, stay," said little Mr. Perker. "Consider, sir, consider."

"I'll *not* consider," replied Jingle. "She's her own mistress—see who dares to take her away—unless she wishes it."

"I *won't* be taken away," murmured the spinster aunt. I *don't* wish it." (Here there was a frightful relapse).

"My dear sir," said the little man, in a low tone, taking Mr. Wardle and Mr. Pickwick apart: "My dear sir, we're in a very awkward situation. It's a distressing case—very; I never knew one more so; but really, my dear sir, really we have no power to control this lady's actions. I warned you before we came, my dear sir, that there was nothing to look to but a compromise."

There was a short pause.

"What kind of compromise would you recommend?" inquired Mr. Pickwick.

"Why, my dear sir, our friend's in an unpleasant position—very much so. We must be content to suffer some pecuniary loss."

"I'll suffer any, rather than submit to this disgrace, and let her, fool as she is, be made miserable for life," said Wardle.

"I rather think it can be done," said the bustling little man. "Mr. Jingle, will you step with us into the next room for a moment?"

Mr. Jingle assented, and the quartette walked into an empty apartment.

"Now, sir," said the little man, as he carefully closed the door, "is there no way of accommodating this matter—step this way, sir, for a moment—into this window, sir, where we can be alone—there, sir, there, pray sit down, sir. Now, my dear sir, between you and I, we know very well, my dear sir, that you have run off with this lady for the sake of her money. Don't frown, sir, don't frown; I say, between you and I, *we* know it. We are both men of the world, and *we* know very well that our friends here, are not—eh?"

Mr. Jingle's face gradually relaxed; and something distantly resembling a wink quivered for an instant in his left eye.

"Very good, very good," said the little man, observing the impression he had made. "Now the fact is, that beyond a few hundreds, the lady has little or nothing till the death of her mother—fine old lady, my dear sir."

"*Old*," said Mr. Jingle, briefly but emphatically.

"Why, yes," said the attorney with a slight cough. "You are right, my dear sir, she is *rather* old. She comes of an old family though, my dear sir; old in every sense of the word. The founder of that family came into Kent, when Julius Cæsar invaded Britain;—only one member of it, since, who hasn't lived to eighty-five, and *he* was beheaded by one of the Henrys. The old lady is not

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